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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 28 April 1993, at 6.15 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. WARD (Canada)

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General debate (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 6.25 p.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mrs. ROMULUS (Observer for Haiti) commended UNICEF for its humanitarian activities throughout the world, and for its valuable assistance to millions of mothers and children. The international community must pay attention to the hopes and fears of the children of the world, who in many places were growing up in the midst of warfare and atrocities, as evidenced by the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other children lived in extreme poverty as was the case in Haiti, a situation of great concern to her President. The coup d'état which had overthrown the democratically elected Government of Haiti had led to mass displacements and the sprouting of shanty towns, with large numbers of orphans and semi-delinquent children.

2. The fundamental challenge of the time was to reduce infant and maternal mortality, chronic malnutrition and illiteracy, and to ensure access to drinking water and medical facilities. That challenge must be met by Governments, specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations. UNICEF in particular was concentrating on that endeavour. Yet UNICEF's initiatives were not enough; health and development were inextricably linked, and the time when health concerns were sacrificed to economic imperatives was over.

3. She welcomed the increased confidence in the ability of the United Nations to tackle the problems of the twenty-first century, including the consolidation of peace and democracy, the protection of the environment, drug control, delinquency, and the unending quest for children's rights, including providing children with the necessities of life.

4. There was no alternative but to meet those challenges, on the basis of increased awareness of a common destiny and international solidarity in interdependence. There was an urgent need to apply specific plans of action, both nationally and internationally. In Haiti, the refusal of the dictatorship to cede to democracy had created even more urgent needs.

5. The world's beliefs would be put to the test, and it would be necessary to find the most effective means of translating into practice the principles and values enunciated in the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children. New approaches were needed and all must work together and mobilize the United Nations system to meet the challenges of the new century.

6. Mrs. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Observer for Kazakhstan) said that, as indicated in panel 16 of the report "The state of the world's children 1993", the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries had experienced serious difficulties in virtually all spheres of socio-political life as a result of the transition to a market economy. The first constitution of independent Kazakhstan, adopted in January 1993, incorporated the human rights standards embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and laid the basis for the social, economic and legal protection of children and mothers, health care, and the care of orphans and neglected children. In October 1992, the President

(Mrs. Arystanbekova, Observer, Kazakhstan)

of Kazakhstan, Mr. Nazarbaev, had signed the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children, thereby confirming Kazakhstan's desire to achieve the goals of the World Summit for Children by the end of the century.

7. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had stressed that the right to a healthy environment was a basic human right. Unfortunately, that right was not afforded to the population in a number of regions of Kazakhstan. In particular the Aral Sea region, once rich with flora and fauna, had become a desert, leading to a sharp deterioration in the health of the population over a vast area. There was also an unsatisfactory situation in the area of the former nuclear test range near Semipalatinsk, in which for almost 40 years surface and underground nuclear tests had been conducted, affecting more than half a million a people. In those regions of Kazakhstan there was a high rate of infant mortality and child malnutrition, and poor maternal health. The President and Government of the Republic had declared those regions to be ecological crisis areas and, were making strenuous efforts to rebuild the environment and treat the affected population. Because of the scale of the damage, however, emergency assistance was needed from the international community, especially in view of the economic difficulties Kazakhstan was encountering in the transition to a market economy.

8. Her Government greatly appreciated the cooperation of UNICEF; the latter's missions to Kazakhstan had formulated specific recommendations on the provision of immediate assistance to the Republic and the allocation of material resources for health needs. Kazakhstan had gratefully received 16 tons of desperately needed children's medicines. During the winter UNICEF, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and the "Bobek" children's fund of the Republic, had formulated and successfully implemented a programme to combat acute respiratory infections, which had produced a significant improvement in child health. UNICEF experts participating in the programme had actively used the mass media to inform the population about the work of the UNICEF mission in Kazakhstan and to make practical recommendations on the prevention of childhood catarrhal infections.

9. The UNICEF country programme for Kazakhstan, in document E/ICEF/1993/P/L.24, correctly identified priorities in the development of health care and the strengthening of its material and technical basis. The two-year programme for Kazakhstan, with its clear goal of mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the transitional period for the most vulnerable group - children and women - was timely and specific, and her Government therefore hoped that it would be approved by the Executive Board.

10. Mr. PASHOVSKI (Bulgaria) said that the current session was of particular importance for UNICEF's activities, given the profound changes in the world and the tremendous challenges facing the international community, one of the most significant of which was that of securing a better future for children. Given the transitional difficulties being experienced by the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as a result of the move towards democracy, and the dramatic situation in some of those societies, particularly in the former Yugoslavia, his delegation attached particular importance to the functions of the unit for Central and Eastern Europe. The unit must continue to react promptly in order to protect children in endangered zones within that region. Of course, his

(Mr. Pashovski, Bulgaria)

delegation did not underestimate the suffering of children in other parts of the world, and would back any initiative aimed at relieving it.

11. Approval of the biennial budget was one of the important tasks before the Board, in which connection his delegation agreed that more transparency was needed in terms of budget planning and operations. Those issues should be thoroughly addressed in the Committee on Administration and Finance. Likewise, emergency funding must be strengthened. He noted with satisfaction the country programme recommendations for the former Soviet Republics in Asian and for Albania, and welcomed the recent UNICEF initiatives to promote inter-agency coordination in executing strategies in the field.

12. The problems of Central and Eastern Europe and the difficulties attending reform had resulted in a decline in the standard of living of large sectors of the population, especially children. Unemployment had led to worsening dietary, health and education standards and had contributed to a demographic crisis. As a follow-up to the World Summit for Children, his Government was preparing a national programme of action, linked with implementation in Bulgaria of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

13. The complex interactions of ethnic groups in the Balkans showed that bringing up children in a spirit of tolerance and peace was of primary concern. Special attention must be given to children belonging to minority groups experiencing the most severe consequences of the crisis. In Bulgaria, new approaches to minority groups were already being adopted.

14. His delegation was confident that UNICEF would continue to meet the challenges of a world that was undergoing a profound transformation, and his Government would continue to assist actively in achieving its worthy goals.

15. Mr. TRAORE (Observer for Mali) said that the Bamako Initiative had been launched at a time when Mali was restructuring its economy with the private sector becoming involved in all fields, including the health sector. It had soon became clear, however, that that approach worked only in urban centres, with a relatively affluent population, while the public sector continued to lack resources. A new, community-based approach under the Bamako Initiative had been particularly effective with regard to primary health care, with population groups taking responsibility for their own health. A number of community health care centres had been established as a result, and the Government had taken measures to ensure the availability of essential medical supplies.

16. As a follow-up to the World Summit for Children, Mali had formulated a national action plan for the survival, development and protection of the child. Intersectoral working groups had been set up to identify priority needs, with emphasis on reducing infant and maternal mortality, developing education, above all for girls, and establishing an institutional and statutory framework in consonance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

17. Cooperation between Mali and UNICEF had resulted in a significant improvement in maternal and child health through improved immunization coverage and better access to drinking water. Nevertheless infant mortality remained high, and malnutrition was widespread. Over 40 per cent of the population lived more than 15 kilometres from a health centre. AIDS was spreading rapidly, and

(Mr. Traore, Observer, Mali)

school enrolment was low, particularly for girls. In such a context UNICEF action must be increased. His delegation was pleased that the programme of cooperation for Mali would be considered at the current session.

18. If Africa was to continue to benefit from UNICEF assistance, the agency's identity, flexibility and ability to respond quickly and effectively must be maintained. He trusted that UNICEF resources would increase so that it could play a still more effective role on behalf of the children of the world.

19. Mr. DORIA MEDINA (Observer for Bolivia) said it was recognized that most of the poor were children, and that most children were poor. The eradication of poverty was an overriding priority, and his delegation was confident that the economic and social functions of the Organization would be strengthened as a result of the current restructuring.

20. In recent years Bolivia had found solutions to a number of its economic difficulties, and the first results of a new policy of social investment, under which human capital was the strategic resource of the State, were now becoming apparent. In Bolivia there was now a clear view of how to combat poverty, with well-defined social objectives on behalf of the neediest sectors. To that end, social investment in health and education had been significantly increased, social institutions had been strengthened to optimize the use of resources allocated to social investment, and a great effort was being made to improve information gathering so as to target services more effectively.

21. Government spending on social investment had increased substantially in 1992 and 1993, and two new government agencies, the National Agency for Minors, Women and the Family and the Social Policy Analysis Unit, had been established in order to strengthen the institutional framework in the social sector. Further, a national census had been conducted in 1992, and social indicators had been prepared using the data gathered. The progress made was evidenced by the 50 per cent reduction in infant mortality since 1976. Equally, indicators demonstrated that various poverty related issues, including illiteracy, were being tackled, and immunization coverage was increasing. Nevertheless, fundamental differences in conditions between rural and urban areas persisted.

22. Bolivia would shortly hold an election, but it was certain that the market economy approach and the new emphasis on social policy would be maintained by any new administration. International assistance remained necessary, however. UNICEF assistance had been instrumental in Bolivia's progress against poverty. Bolivia's programme of cooperation with UNICEF over the next five years clearly reflected the national objectives of devoting greater resources to improving the living standards of the target groups through community-based social policy intervention.

23. Mr. TÜRK (Observer for Slovenia) said that preparations were under way for the establishment of a national committee for UNICEF in Slovenia, and a cooperation agreement with UNICEF would be signed in the near future. UNICEF greeting cards had been sold in Slovenia for over 20 years; in 1989 and 1990 sales had reached 2 million, more than one greeting card per inhabitant. That was just one of the ways his country showed its appreciation for the work of UNICEF. Its message had reached every home in Slovenia.

(Mr. Türk, Observer, Slovenia)

24. In the past year, UNICEF had become increasingly involved in emergency situations worldwide, placing new and greater demands on its resources. Slovenia had become the temporary home of some 70,000 refugees fleeing the brutal war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Croatia. Forty-seven per cent of those refugees were children under 16 and 41 per cent were women. The citizens of Slovenia had tried their best to provide adequate facilities and to gather financial and material resources for their support. Along with food, shelter and medical services, the care of refugee children included a variety of educational programmes designed to implement one of the basic human rights - the right to education. Of course, only the voluntary return of refugees to their homes would provide a real solution. International aid, largely from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, had been received, but the needs still vastly exceeded available resources. Increased international assistance was essential for the well-being of refugees in Slovenia, since its own resources were already stretched to the limit. Financial aid to support local purchase of supplies was the highest priority.

25. The meeting of the Executive Board was taking place at a time of positive change in public attitudes towards children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was among the first international treaties to which Slovenia had ratified its succession in 1991. The World Summit for Children had resulted in specific and realistic recommendations and goals, which his Government wholeheartedly supported and would incorporate into its policies.

26. As for the financial health of UNICEF, his delegation was concerned by the outlook for 1993. Sufficient financial resources were of paramount importance if UNICEF was to continue to expand its activities in pursuit of its objectives for the benefit of the world's children.

27. Mr. ZVEZDIN (Russian Federation) said that one of the main distinguishing features of UNICEF had always been its willingness to be in the forefront of the struggle to protect the interests of children, however difficult the circumstances. The new and sometimes unexpected challenges of recent years which had often painfully affected the situation of children, had repeatedly confirmed the relevance of the principles proclaimed in the final agreements of the World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the urgent need to implement them at all costs. UNICEF was making very commendable efforts to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action, particularly in developing countries. UNICEF participation in international efforts to provide assistance to children and mothers in emergency situations was of increasing importance for many States in virtually all regions of the world; that participation should be increased through, inter alia, an enlargement of the Emergency Programme Fund. His delegation supported the concept of greater coordination between UNICEF and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which was a good example of an integrated approach in the area of operational activities in accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/199. Among new UNICEF undertakings, the "Debt for Children Swap" was of great interest.

(Mr. Zvezdin, Russian Federation)

28. His Government was extremely grateful for the mobilization of humanitarian assistance to the Russian Federation and other CIS countries. The UNICEF and WHO missions to 14 countries of the former USSR in 1992 had formulated practical recommendations which had done much to bring about a better understanding by the international community of the special difficulties, of those countries, as demonstrated at the Tokyo Coordinating Conference on Humanitarian Assistance to the new independent States. The Governments of Canada, Switzerland and a number of other countries had provided invaluable assistance, particularly in the supply of vaccines and medicines for children. However, his Government did not intend to rely on external sources to solve the urgent problems of children and mothers; that approach would be irresponsible for a powerful country like his own which would soon be able to assist other countries, above all developing countries in "The State of the World's Children 1993".

29. His delegation shared the view in "The State of the World's Children 1993" that the goals for children could be implemented only through political commitments at the highest levels and with the widespread support of politicians, press and public. The transitional period in his country, and the decline in the population's standard of living, was particularly difficult for children and mothers. Because of budget reductions there was a decline in maternal and child State medical care; difficulties were therefore arising in the implementation of programmes for such care, school nutrition, the child nutrition industry and the production of medicines and vaccines. The rise of infant mortality was an urgent socio-economic problem. Such factors as the critical shortage of food, medicines and vaccines for children, the deterioration of the educational situation, the increasing number of neglected children and the rise in juvenile crime and drug addiction were exacerbating many negative trends; decisive action was needed to halt the deterioration of the situation of children and women and as far as possible neutralize the adverse consequences of the transitional period.

30. By a special decree of the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Yeltsin, of 1 June 1992, the problems of the survival, protection and development of children had been recognized as a matter of priority at the federal and regional levels, particularly in establishing budgets, allocating material and financial resources, organizing and developing production and investing in socio-economic programmes. His Government had drawn up a federal programme "Children of Russia", similar to national programmes of action, laying down the main goals, principles and directions of State policy and also the means of implementation at the federal, territorial and local levels. Despite the Government's efforts, however, many problems of children linked to the deterioration of the economic and financial situation remained unsolved, and in a number of countries those problems were acute. In solving those problems his country would draw on its own resources, and on international experience and assistance.

31. His delegation welcomed the Executive Director's conclusions and recommendations regarding UNICEF activities in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic countries and CIS, on the basis of resolution 1992/19, and attached importance to the work done by UNICEF, in conjunction with UNESCO, in assisting children and women who were victims of the Chernobyl disaster, in accordance with resolution 1992/20.

(Mr. Zverdin, Russian Federation)

32. On the question of headquarters office accommodation, his delegation supported the views and recommendations set forth in the Executive Director's report (E/ICEF/1993/AB/L.9) and in his oral statement.

33. His delegation paid tribute to the UNICEF staff who had died in the line of duty. Those losses highlighted the need to give serious consideration to the question of protecting UNICEF staff and the staff of other organs and organizations of the United Nations system.

34. Mr. RANASINGHE (Sri Lanka) said that his country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and as a follow-up had launched a national plan of action. Universal child immunization coverage had been achieved in 1989 and maintained since then. It was hoped that polio and neonatal tetanus would be completely eradicated from Sri Lanka by 1995.

35. Cooperation on the survival, development and protection of children in South Asia had been promoted by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Ministerial Meeting on Children held at Colombo in September 1992. The Colombo Resolution had committed the SAARC countries to strive to alleviate disparities in health, nutrition, education and social conditions, as well as to address the problem of young mothers and child labour. The SAARC countries had also pledged to raise the age of marriage of women to 18 years and eliminate gender discrimination among children. The SAARC Meeting had further promoted a degree of interaction between SAARC and UNICEF.

36. UNICEF was a household name in most developing countries. It should coordinate with other United Nations agencies to ensure more effective programme delivery and refrain from becoming involved in areas where other United Nations agencies were already present; it should maintain its good record of complementarity with other agencies.

37. His delegation had participated in the UNICEF field visits to Viet Nam and Nepal; such visits should be further encouraged. His delegation had also been a member of the Reference Group and was pleased that the format and presentation of the administrative and programme budget was appreciated; the current budget was being prepared in accordance with the recommendations of the Reference Group.

38. He paid tribute to the UNICEF staff members killed in the line of duty and urged the adoption of appropriate safety measures. On several occasions, his delegation had drawn attention to the need to pay adequate compensation to the families of victims.

39. UNICEF was increasingly being called upon to respond to emergency situations, and he thanked UNICEF for its quick response in the provision of medical supplies and other assistance to some parts of Sri Lanka affected by terrorist violence.

40. Lastly, he said that the unique identity of UNICEF as a neutral and impartial humanitarian and development agency should be maintained and remain unaffected by any structural changes in the United Nations system.

41. Mr. KLINK (Observer for the Holy See) said that the hallmark of UNICEF had been its focus on eliminating the basic dangers to children and mothers - disease and hunger - by providing basic education, adequate food, clean water, sanitation and primary health care. UNICEF was able to establish bonds between diverse nations, races and creeds through the achievement of consensus, which ensured the fullest participation of all. The recipient of the 1993 Maurice Pate Award, the state of Ceara, Brazil, provided a good example of the results of such a consensus. All of its institutions had worked together to promote the most basic right - the right to life - of the children of the area.

42. The Catholic Church was proud of its innumerable activities carried out every day in all parts of the world by dedicated people who shared in the Gospel's mandate to care for children. Its activities included schools, hospitals, orphanages and foundling homes, among many others. In addition, Catholic institutions and programmes provided food and shelter in situations caused by natural disasters or political upheaval.

43. A common characteristic of such programmes was their respect for the local culture and their emphasis on support to the family in order to make programmes for children more effective. In order to be successful and developmental in approach, the education of children must be inclusionary rather than exclusionary, aiming at the fullest participation of the entire family unit. Accordingly, education regarding healthy lifestyles should always be founded on basic moral principles. Education programmes relating to reproductive health should emphasize "responsible sexual behaviour" rather than the misleading term "safe sex".

44. Similarly, his delegation echoed the concern expressed by others that UNICEF must maintain its identity. Attempts to make UNICEF all things to all people, to so broaden its field of activity that its mandate became identical to that of any other development agency, might lead to a loss of popular support. To pre-empt scarce resources of ongoing essential programmes and redirect them to family planning programmes already mandated to other agencies was both contradictory and a duplication of effort.

45. The Holy See noted with satisfaction that the document entitled "UNICEF policy on family planning" (E/ICEF/1993/L.5) stated clearly that UNICEF had never provided support for abortion and it continued to be the long-standing UNICEF policy not to support abortion as a means of family planning, and that UNICEF did not provide contraceptive supplies from its resources. Much of the specific wording of the document, however, placed it directly at odds with the Catholic Church's moral teaching. Thus, great sensitivity would be needed in the course of the drafting sessions to protect the common interest in maintaining the proud tradition of consensus.

46. Mrs. ARUNGU-OLENDE (Observer for Kenya) said that humanitarian and technical assistance from UNICEF had helped to ensure the survival of many children. The generous support of donor countries and greater commitment to children's welfare on the part of Governments had also helped UNICEF in the performance of its mandate. UNICEF had succeeded in gaining broad acceptance by the people and Governments of many countries, and that valuable advantage must be maintained if it was to continue serving the needs of future generations.

(Mrs. Arungu-Olende, Observer, Kenya)

47. UNICEF assistance to ensure the survival of the African child had culminated in the International Conference on Assistance to African Children, which had provided countries of the region and their partners with an opportunity to assess the current situation of the children of Africa and to accelerate the preparation of national programmes. The responsibility for achieving goals and targets rested first and foremost on Governments, although the valuable assistance of the international community was recognized.

48. In Kenya, emergency conditions caused by civil strife in neighbouring countries, drought and famine had brought an influx of refugees, the majority of whom were children and women. Very difficult decisions had to be made and priorities reorganized based on the most urgent demands, resulting in the redirection of resources to emergency situations and away from national programmes. Her delegation called on UNICEF to continue to pay particular attention to trends in Africa so that emergency operations would remain distinct from regular field activities.

49. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/199, UNICEF should coordinate its activities with other United Nations agencies in the field, while maintaining its autonomy. Her delegation was pleased that UNICEF had a comparative advantage in the area of decentralization of its field activities. However, it should also ensure that beneficiaries had greater access to the decision-making process. Capacity-building and empowerment, especially of women, could not be successfully sustained unless the people to be empowered were given the opportunity to build their management skills and become decision makers.

50. The Convention on the Rights of the Child had given Governments and the international community new impetus to reappraise their laws and practices relating to children. Supervision of its implementation lay with Governments, but UNICEF could assist and encourage its implementation in order to promote the best interests and protection of the child.

51. Children's problems were reflections of deeper problems of families, and of women in particular. Her delegation believed that to empower the woman was to save the child.

52. Mr. KLAPH (NGO Committee on UNICEF) said that the NGO Committee's activities continued to be guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit Plan of Action. He supported the call of the Executive Director for universal ratification of the Convention by 1995. In March, the NGO Committee had, jointly with UNICEF and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, held a Consultation on "The role of the United Nations and NGOs in the implementation of the Convention", attended by representatives of 11 United Nations agencies and 37 international NGOs. The Consultation had formulated recommendations for action by NGOs, Governments, donors, the United Nations system and the Committee on the Rights of the Child; those recommendations would be submitted to the World Conference on Human Rights at Vienna in June.

53. An NGO working group had written and begun distribution of a "Summary of international treaties to protect children in armed conflict".

(Mr. Klaph)

54. The NGO Committee would hold its third meeting of chief executive officers of major humanitarian and development organizations at Geneva in January 1994 on the theme "The contribution of youth to lasting peace".

55. NGOs in many countries had been helping to develop and implement national programmes of action following the World Summit for Children. Those developed by African Governments had been discussed at the recent International Conference on Assistance to African Children in Dakar, which had been attended by NGOs as full participants. There had thus been a renewed focus on Africa by a number of major NGOs. He was pleased that donors had committed themselves to increasing the percentage of official development assistance allocated to social development, and hoped that donors would act urgently on that commitment.

56. NGOs had worked closely with UNICEF staff at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the International Conference on Nutrition. He hoped that quantifiable goals with respect to children's needs would be reflected in the various national programmes of action.

57. He was pleased at the vigorous efforts to promote the education of girls and women, which was a key factor in social and economic development. The NGO Committee had formed a task force to collect information about programmes that actually increased the access of girls to education, in order to encourage NGOs to invest more of their resources in the reduction of gender disparity.

58. One month previously, the NGO Committee had held a consultation with national counterparts in Central and Eastern Europe, where NGOs were emerging in considerable numbers. The report on that consultation would be available in July 1993. The NGO Committee further had plans to hold a Regional Conference on the Convention on the Rights of the Child in November in Central America.

59. Lastly, he was pleased with the increased level of collaboration in information and advocacy programmes that had resulted from strengthening of the secretariat in New York and Geneva.

60. Mr. SY (Organization of African Unity (OAU)) observed that 35,000 children under the age of 5 died daily in the developing countries. Some 60 per cent of those deaths and much of the world's illness and malnutrition were caused by just three preventable diseases: pneumonia, diarrhoea and measles. As a result of armed conflict in various regions and political and economic transformations in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, increasing demands were being placed on UNICEF, and therefore its resources should be increased and its efficiency enhanced. He paid tribute to all UNICEF staff members killed in the line of duty. Regarding restructuring and revitalization, the delivery of social services, capacity-building and empowerment would require more evaluation in order to ensure greater effectiveness. With regard to financial issues, the relationships between the administrative and programme support budget and global funds budget should be examined and clearly defined; as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, an operational linkage should be established between the two budgets.

(Mr. Sy)

61. OAU had taken a leading role in promoting awareness of the needs of African children and had organized jointly with UNICEF the recent International Conference on Assistance to African Children. Over 45 African countries had now prepared national programmes of action and taken steps to channel more funds to the social sector. In order to achieve the goals of such programmes world wide during the current decade, UNICEF had calculated that $25 billion would be required annually, and that the developing countries would need to devote at least 20 per cent of budgetary expenditure to the social sector. Furthermore, 20 per cent of official development assistance would need to be allocated to human priority concerns. If the African countries were to devote sufficient funds to the social sector, there would have to be effective debt-relief measures, as well as more realistic prices for African commodity exports. The role of UNICEF was vital for the development of the social sector of developing countries. While the African countries had undertaken to allocate a substantial part of their budget to that sector, OAU would welcome meaningful cooperation on the part of the international community to strengthen their budgetary resources.

62. Mrs. FAJARDO (Observer for Cuba) said that the principle of a "first call for children" was of particular importance at a time when the world was confronting enormous problems which were putting the lives of children at risk. Cuba had consistently implemented that principle and had achieved significant results in child survival and overall development. Because of the international events that had been affecting Cuba's trade relations over the past five years its response capacities needed to be strengthened so as to maintain the levels of child welfare which had been achieved over many years of intense work. The national programme of action to achieve goals of the World Summit for Children, which had been assessed in November 1992 at the end of the first year of implementation, had been an important factor in achieving those objectives.

63. Cuba's favourable indicators of child mortality, literacy and school attendance demonstrated her Government's political will to make all the necessary efforts for the development and well-being of children, despite severe financial constraints. It was significant that such phenomena as the sale of children for adoption, child prostitution, child pornography, traffic in children and child labour did not exist in Cuba. UNICEF had to take up those serious problems, because of their wide repercussions.

64. An epidemic of an eye disease, optical neuritis, had recently developed in Cuba; isolated cases had first been detected towards the end of 1992 and over the past weeks the number of cases had significantly increased. Cuba was combating the epidemic with all available resources, relying on its strong health system and numerous health institutions.

65. Her delegation felt that some of the proposals for reform referred to in the multi-donor evaluation of UNICEF (E/ICEF/1993/CRP.7), ran counter to the trend for greater democratization of the United Nations. As to UNICEF's intervention strategies, her delegation firmly believed that they should continue to emphasize its goals of promoting the interests of children in accordance with its specific mandate; in that respect, Governments continued to play a primary role.

66. Mr. NGUYEN MINH THONG (Observer for Viet Nam) said that UNICEF was to be commended for its efforts to assist Governments with their national plans of action following the World Summit for Children. Renewed and enhanced commitment would be needed on the part of both donor and recipient communities in order to achieve the Summit's goals. UNICEF had over the years proved its ability to deliver low-cost, high-impact initiatives and innovative intervention in a number of areas. He commended UNICEF for its active responses to the "loud" emergency situations which had arisen in various parts of the world, and for its efforts and activities with regard to children and sustainable development, the Bamako Initiative, the Baby-Friendly Hospitals Initiative, as well as fund raising and improved management. Regarding restructuring and revitalization, he urged close coordination among United Nations agencies, but stressed that under no circumstances should the unique comparative advantage of UNICEF be eroded.

67. In the 1970s and early 1980s, UNICEF had provided emergency relief assistance to Viet Nam, and had subsequently moved towards more permanent and well-planned country programmes of cooperation. As one of the first to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Viet Nam had taken all possible steps to translate the Convention into legislation to ensure the utmost care and protection for children and mothers. While Viet Nam had in recent years been engaged in a vigorous process of renovation and reform, UNICEF had provided Vietnamese children and mothers with valuable assistance, which had been an effective catalytic factor in forming a strong and widespread local and national alliance for children in Viet Nam. He expressed his delegation's thanks and appreciation for the effective assistance of UNICEF and its dedicated staff. Lastly, he urged donor countries to increase substantially their contributions to UNICEF.

The meeting rose at 8.40 p.m.